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7th Annual Quest for Excellence

Our readers determine their favorite suppliers in 50 product categories.

by Rob Wilson

You are known by the company you keep. And so it is that the supply chain is such a powerful tool in establishing the pedigree of the finished vehicle. OEMs never get carried to the top levels of the J. D. Power survey on the shoulders of mediocre suppliers. Nor will they favorably impact warranty costs or vehicle recalls. Seamless integration of suppliers with other suppliers and then with OEMs is said to be the last frontier in automotive cost cutting.

The degree to which a supplier's core competencies are developed runs through the finished vehicle in every direction and dimension. It is the component or system itself as well as the processes behind it and sure footed logistics that insure consistency in quality and properly sequenced delivery.

Reputation is built painstakingly over time, and can be destroyed overnight. Programs of continuous improvement, Six Sigma and a variety of custom made lean strategies are the keys to matching up with the requirements of each specific OEM. With the proliferation of vehicle models and shorter product cycles, launch processes are more important than ever before and missteps affect quality ratings.

It takes the proper aligning of supplier and OEM resources at the earliest point in the product development cycle tracking right through the delivery process to optimize the product quality, final design, cost and speed to market. The key concerns in quality management involve identifying the quality aspects that are important to the OEM, improving processes or products to achieve the optimal set of quality aspects, and creating new processes where existing processes fail to permit continuous improvement.

That's one reason why we changed the methodology in our Quest for Excellence survey this year. Last year we asked OEM readers to examine a list of approximately 350 principle suppliers and rate them by five factors. Those included quality, innovation, price, delivery and service/support. They were asked to assign a number from 1-5, with 1 being an excellent rating and 5 being poor.

The results, while clear enough with respect to establishing leading suppliers of those on our list, didn't account for suppliers who were not on our list. We were leading the witness. And while it was clear that if US Steel finished high on our list, which it did, that it was for supplying steel. But if PPG finished in the top fifty, which it did last year, was it for supplying paint, or for glass? If readers chose Delphi or Johnson Controls, we could only say that they were generally well thought of. Product groups could not be determined.



This year we didn't include a supplier list of any kind but we did ask readers about specific product categories instead, listing over 50. We asked them to list up to three suppliers in each product category in their order of preference, but using the same factors as last year.

Now that we have the results for the 7th Annual Quest For Excellence, what is most remarkable is that so many of the same companies bubble to the top.

Johnson Controls placed first in five different product categories. Other multiple product category winners include Bosch, Delphi, Denso, and TRW. Though the preponderance of winners are Tier 1 suppliers, there are some smaller companies as well. We surveyed more than 25 percent of our OEM readers to determine the best suppliers in more than 50 product categories. Our congratulations to the first place finishers listed on the opposite page. Our thanks to our readers for participating.

QFE04 AWARD WINNERS

| | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| ABS Control | Bosch | Instrument Panel | Johnson Controls |
| Air Bags | Autoliv | Leather | Eagle Ottawa |
| Aluminum | Alcoa | Lighting Systems | Hella |
| Audio Systems | Pioneer | Metal Stampings | Tower Automotive |
| Axles | Dana | Mirrors | Magna Donnelly |
| Body Trim | Lear | Overhead Systems | Johnson Controls |
| Brake Systems | Continental Teves | Paint | Dupont |
| Business Software | SAP | Plastic Feedstock | GE Plastics |
| Console Assembly | Intier | Plastic Molded Parts | Key Plastics |
| Convertible Tops | Karmann | Remote Keyless Entry | TRW |
| Cruise Control Systems | Delphi | Seat Belts | TRW |
| Driveline Components | Borg Warner | Seats | Johnson Controls |
| Engineering Software | IBM CATIA | Steel | US Steel |
| Engine Management Systems | Johnson Controls | Suspension | Delphi |
| Exhaust Systems | ArvinMeritor | Telematic Devices & Systems | Delphi |
| Fabrics | Collins & Aikman | Tires | Michelin |
| Fuel Systems | Bosch | Transmissions | ZE Group |
| Glass | PPG | Turbochargers | Honeywell Garrett |
| Heat Exchangers | Behr | Weather Stripping | Cooper Standard |
| HVAC | Denso | Window Regulators | Denso |
| Hydroformed Parts | Magna Cosma | Wiper Module & Blades | Bosch |
| Instrument Cluster | Johnson Controls | Wiring Harnesses | Yazaki |